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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN POLITICS III #18: VARGAS MALDONADO
OUTLINES PRD'S FOREIGN POLICY OUTLOOK

Classified By: Economic-Political Counselor Michael A. Meigs, Reasons 1
.4(b), (d)

11. (U) This is the 18th cable in our series on Dominican
politics in the third year of the administration of President
Leonel Fernandez.

(U) Summary: In a speech to the diplomatic corps,
presidential candidate Miguel Vargas Maldonado said that the
foreign policy of a Dominican government led by his Dominican
Revolutionary Party (PRD) would prioritize relations with the
United States and Haiti. Describing U.S. leading role in
international affairs as "not subject to discussion," Vargas
said the PRD -- should the party win the 2008 election --
would take decisive steps to complete the DR-CAFTA
negotiations. The PRD candidate also noted the importance
his party places on foreign assistance, international
organizations, promotion of democracy, European Union,
Central America, the Caribbean, Asia, counter-narcotics
efforts, the fight against terrorism, the environment, and
human rights. End summary.

THE UNITED STATES

(U) In a February 9 speech to invited members of the
diplomatic corps at Santo Domingo's Hotel El Embajador, PRD
presidential Vargas said that the U.S.'s "democratic system
and strong institutions serve as a reference and guide as we
seek our own path," and thanked the U.S. for its "enormous
efforts" on behalf of Dominican development. Vargas also
noted the role played by the Dominican community in the
United States, which he said has "provided its sweat and
labor for the mutual benefit of both economies."

HAITI

(U) Vargas directly addressed the controversial subject of

Haiti and the Haitian minority in the Dominican Republic. He said the countries of Hispaniola are "united viscerally by geography... sometimes in confrontation, more often in solidarity. They are two individual countries with one destiny inevitably tied together." The PRD candidate argued that Dominicans and Haitians have "learned to elevate their affections and differences to a productive dialogue," despite the efforts of "dark voices" in both countries that attempt to frame these issues in racial terms.

(SBU) In a theme common in Dominican discourse, Vargas reproached the international community. "The solution (to Haiti's problems) is not solely in the hands of the Dominican people. To address it, we need the efforts of all: the Haitian people and principally the developed countries, especially those that owe a historical debt for their colonial exploitation."

EUROPE, ETC.

(U) After commenting in depth on relations with the United States and Haiti, Vargas made a series of brief comments on other issues:

FOREIGN ASSISTANCE. The PRD party views development assistance as "a two-way street, in which the preeminent economies owe a historic and social debt to the less fortunate countries, but also where the Dominican solidarity is provided to those nations that can learn from (our) experience."

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. A Dominican government led by the PRD would "continue strengthening our participation in

the organization of the United Nations system, the OAS, and other regional and subregional bodies... keeping in mind that, in some cases, those organizations will need to adapt to changing times."

DEMOCRACY. "We will use diplomatic action to promote the development of democracy, nationally and regionally, as a means of guaranteeing the rule of law and the free exercise individual and collective liberties for the citizens of our continent."

EUROPE. Relations with Europe are broad and deepening, particularly in the areas of foreign assistance, investment, tourism, trade, and technology transfer.

CENTRAL AMERICA. A Vargas administration would provide decisive support to sub-regional integration efforts, both economic and political.

THE CARIBBEAN. The Dominican Republic should strengthen its ties with the "brother countries" of the Caribbean, and in so doing "break the anachronistic barriers that separate them."

ASIA. The Dominican Republic "should reevaluate the scope and objectives of its relations with (Asia).... (We) consider it necessary to open new diplomatic frontiers (in the region), notably with regard to trade, where informal exchanges have been established by Dominican entities in various Asian countries, without being supported by a legal underpinning."

COUNTER-NARCOTICS. "We will spare no effort in combating... the trafficking of drugs, (including) by signing new agreements with friendly countries (involved in this important struggle)."

TERRORISM: "We will maintain and strengthen the existing efforts to (combat terrorism), in coordination with all countries of the civilized world."

THE ENVIRONMENT: A Vargas administration would seek to "guarantee the preservation and reconstitution of the environment, both national and international."

HUMAN RIGHTS. "Any type of torture or humiliation would be

absolutely inadmissible for our government.... We (also) believe in a human rights regimen that does not discriminate (on the basis of social class)."

COMMENT

(C) Vargas' speech held few surprises, the Embassy was nevertheless pleased to see his campaign moving from sound bites to policy commentary, however general. Leonel Fernandez could have spoken these platitudes. In an aside to POLOFF, a representative from the Chinese trade office interpreted Vargas' remarks as presaging a possible switch of diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China -- and we have no doubt that a PRD government would skillfully play this issue to its advantage in negotiations on foreign assistance, regardless of its true intentions.

(C) The preeminence of the United States in the Dominican foreign policy worldview was unquestioned. Vargas' references to the developing world's entitlement to foreign assistance based on "colonial exploitation" struck us as obligatory rhetoric. In short, Vargas' presentation was a largely ritual one of Dominican political business as usual. And for that we have no reproaches, as yet.

-- Drafted by Peter Hensch

(U) This report and extensive other material can be consulted on our SIPRNET site,
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo/>
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